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THE TEST.

OR,

THE WAY TO DISTINGUISH TINSEL FROM GOLD,

AND

PEARL FROM POTTERY;

BEING A CRITICAL NOTICE OF

"POEMS BY AMELIA."

BY A LADY.

LOUISVILLE, KY:

PRINTED ON THE MORNING COURIER OFFICE POWER PRESS.

1845.

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POEMS. BY AMELIA.

BOSTON: A. TOMPKINS, CORNHILL. 1845—p.p. 269.

It is pleasant, at any time, to receive a new volume of poetry, fresh from the hands of its author, and publisher; it is doubly pleasant, if the author be an American; and it is even delightful, if the work be the production of a lady. Such a volume, placed before us, by some kind friend, gives a promise of rare and racy things in store for us—a feast of dainties, delicately, and tastefully prepared, at which the intellectual appetite may banquet, without fear of present satiety, or future distaste. And, if the mental treat come to us heralded by the praises of critics, of ample ability to analyze, and of judgment and taste to compare and discriminate, we are predisposed to receive it with courtesy and kindness, to examine it favorably, and to enjoy, to the utmost, all the treasures of nature, feeling, and fancy, with which the genius of its author may have enriched and adorned it.

Attended by all these prepossessing circumstances, there came to us lately, an annual-like volume, entitled—"Poems, by Amelia." It is confessedly a *beautiful volume* of poems, and, looking on its gorgeous cover of scarlet and gold, the smooth surface, fine texture, and glossy lustre of its paper, and its fair and splendid type, it is difficult to doubt, that it is also a volume of *beautiful poems.* The contents of the work, a very few pieces excepted, were wholly unknown to us; and we opened it with a sincere desire to derive from it, all the pleasure and profit, it might be calculated to afford. But, to our regret, we too soon became apprehensive, that the amount of these would be insufficient to fill up the measure of our hopes and expectations.

On examining the frontispiece and motto, both taken from the first poem in the volume, it is impossible not to perceive, that the latter is injudiciously selected, and that the former is conceived in bad taste, and executed with but little skill.

The female figure, (intended to represent the poetess herself,) is, in its whole air, attitude and expression, of a character strikingly dull, and decidedly "mawkish." The lady stands in a boudoir, at a casement, when she should be in the open air, by the sea-shore; her hands dangle listlessly down from the wrists, and, together with her inanimate features, and "lackadaisical" posture, give to her an expression the very reverse of intellectual, and perfectly emotionless. There is no appearance, in her face or figure, of either pleasure, admiration, or devotion. She does not even look at the "rainbow;" her eyes are fixed on an opposite toilet-glass, in which her interesting person, (to borrow one of her own favorite expressions,) is "mirrored."

The casement, by which she stands, would certainly afford her any extent of prospect she might wish to command; for, allowing even for perspective, it is somewhat wider than the "rainbow," which she tells us, "stretched to the uttermost ends of the earth."

These faults, however, belong to the designer, and engraver; but certainly, if the picture be intended to embody any thing naturally suggested by the poem, entitled "The Rainbow," it is, in almost every particular, a complete and ridiculous failure. But these things are comparatively trivial, and must therefore occupy no more of our time.

After a careful perusal of the entire volume, and repeated re-examinations of all the pieces in any measure worthy of particular notice, the candid and discriminating reader is obliged to confess, that the delicacies, promised in the repast, are but too much—

> "Like dead sea fruits, that tempt the eye,
> But turn to ashes on the lips."

On almost every page of this volume, there is, clearly apparent, a perpetual effort to shine, or rather to glitter, and the glare of mere tinsel is blindly mistaken for the sparkling of gems. The sickly radiance, thus made to gild every object, and to color every thought, is as repugnant to good taste, as it is contrary to the truthfulness of nature, and the fervour of deep feeling.

The poetess tells us that her "soul burns with wild poetic fire;" and when she is possessed with the peculiar "fine phrenzy," every thing she says, does, or fancies, is transcendental. Her "dew-drops" are "wept from stars"—her leaves murmur to her in such "spirit-tones," that she, in order to be no less devout and spiritual, "answers with a

prayer." Her sea-shores are among the most "verdant," "flowery," and "perfumed" spots of earth, irrigated with "leaping rills," and dotted with "breezy hills," whose "mossy sides" "slope to the seas;" her ocean-waves, instead of crests of foam, have "dimpled faces," and,

> "Like little children, wild with glee,
> They linked their *dimpled hands*."

Her little singing-birds, (that never fly aloft, and whose chosen homes are in shrubbery and under-brush, or, at farthest, in groves, and low forest trees,) freed from their cages, ascend at once, (in her inflated lays,) to "the upper heaven," "*where the morning stars once sang together*," and thence plunge dauntlessly *into the sun*. For she says to one of those weak-winged warblers, just released from its prison-house—

> "For thou wilt wander to yon upper heaven,
> And bathe thy plumage in the *sunbeams' home*."

Now, if the *home* of the sunbeams be not in the *sun himself*, we cannot even *fancy* the whereabout of their dwelling-place. This feat, just described, would seem to be sufficiently daring and arduous to satisfy most birds, whether little or big; but this one, so feelingly apostrophized by the poetess, unscathed by his *fiery bath*, just alluded to, soars *upward* again, until he is very naturally, "lost to human sight." Indeed, the wonder is, that any mere human optics did not lose sight of him long before; and we are persuaded that no "orbs" other than those of the poetess, could have retained a glimpse of him, even at half the distance. We have never heard of but one similar instance of long-sightedness, and clear vision; and that is related in the ballad of "Sally Brown," who, when her "beau Ben" is carried off by a press-gang, thus declares her determination—

> "But I will to the water's side,
> And see him *out of sight*.

When the poetess is in this rapt condition, every thing "*floats*" with her—the "clouds," the "angels," the "rainbow," the "moon and stars," and, at last, she even floats herself; for, she says—

> Star on star, all soft and calm,
> *Floats up* yon arch serenely blue,
> And lost to earth, and *steeped in balm*,
> *My spirit floats in ether too*."

And this may account for the whole *floating* panorama. For, as Shakespeare says—"He that is *giddy*, thinks the world *turns round*."

Another very palpable defect is the continual repetition of certain pretty words and phrases, evidently selected on account of their supposed poetical sound; and because they have been employed, time immemorial, by poets, *great* and *small*——by the *former*, to clothe natural, striking, and poetical thoughts; in which case, their aptitude and power are both seen and felt. But the *latter*, mistaking the drapery, in which it is clad, for the spirit of poetry itself, employ them to cover their own poverty of conception, and to disguise and give currency to trite thoughts, and inapt similies. Our authoress having made an abundant collection of these dainty, tinkling, and fire-fly expressions, uses them with a liberality certainly unsurpassed by any of her predecessors. She has the "seas" always at hand, "laughing or dimpled"—"breezy hills"—"leaping," or "singing rills"—the "*hush*" of the "wave," the "twilight',' and the "tomb"——"wings," of "angels," "doves," and "rainbows"—"stars," "weeping dew-drops," or "floating"—"roses" "fainting" or "slumbering"—"wet lips"—"tresses"—"tears"—"murmurs"—"tremblings"—"raptures"—and "bliss." In truth, we can scarcely read a stanza, without encountering a sigh, or look upon a page, without being invited to sympathize with a succession of "*thrills*."

In her application of these brilliant materials, the poetess is much more profuse and tautological, than discreet and judicious. Thrown into slightly different forms, those sparkling fragments, constitute, in fact, nearly the whole of her available means; and, being applied to every thing, with almost equal inaptitude, they come at last to mean nothing—reminding us forcibly of a toy, with which we have at times amused ourselves, for half an hour, in childhood—a kaleidoscope, into which a score of differently colored pieces of glass are promiscuously thrown, (no matter what may be their size, shape, or quality,) and which applied to the eye and moved slowly, gives at each turn a slightly different figure, composed of precisely the same materials, always pretty and glittering, but wearisome even to a child; merely because it neither suggests ideas to the mind, nor furnishes any thing that the memory can retain even for a moment.

There is yet another clearly perceptible fault of the authoress, pervading her *entire work*. It is, that, whatever be the subject of her verse,

or to whomsoever addressed, she sings, at least, fully as much of herself, as of any thing else; and there is too evident a degree of exaggerated sensibility in all she professes to feel in her own person, or attributes to others. Her remembrances, and friendships, loves and joys, are so excessive, as to raise her far above the sympathies, and above even the comprehension of ordinary mortals. Her friends surpass in loveliness every conceivable degree of human perfection, and are "pure" and praiseworthy, beyond all hope of comparison, or conception, even by herself. In her own words, (which to us, however, are wholly without meaning,) the dreams of one of those etherial beings, were "*pure as a feeling unborn.*" Nevertheless, *she* has herself passed with these sublimated creatures—

"——such hours of *bliss*,
As none but *kindred hearts* can know.—"

thus assuming to herself a degree of perfection corresponding to all the exquisiteness of theirs.

In illustration of our remarks, on this all-pervading spirit of inflated egotism, we refer our readers to almost every line in which she speaks in the first person; while we present to them a few brief extracts, too clear and appropriate to our purpose to be either misunderstood or cavilled at.

In her address to "the stars," she says—

"Ye startle thoughts within this heart of mine,
That I *must* breathe, or it will break in twain;"

and yet, all the *heart-breaking* thoughts, "breathed" in the three next stanzas, are of herself *exclusively*, detailing what she used to do in "wildest glee," when she was a little child; such as lying on the top of one of her *peculiar* "breezy hills," on the sea shore, under trees, whose leaves dropt dew upon her, gazing at the stars. We also hear perpetually of her "tender heart"—her "mild spirit"—her "sweet, wild thoughts"—her "heart formed for softness and for tears;" and again of her personal perfections, when she refers to her "forehead starred with beauty"—her "young head"—her "tresses"—her "little hand"—her "dark brown ringlets"—and her "warm lip." In one place she speaks of a "fleecy cloud" that (*floated*, of course,) "between *me* (herself) and the *skies*"—an expression productive, in the

mind of the reader, of a strong suspicion, that she did not remember any other object on earth for the cloud to float over, but herself. But we should swell our pages too inordinately, were we to recite but a tithe of the instances of this self-exaltation.

When attempting to be sweetly simple, the poetess's effort, palpable to the dullest comprehension, renders the verses she indites so affectedly insipid, that they become of the order termed, by critics, the "Rosa-Matilda." And with that grade of common-place must a large number of these poems be unavoidably classed. Nor is her exquisite sensibility much less exceptionable, on account of its obvious and labored exaggeration.

In consequence of her unceasing struggle to appear super-eminent, her professions of friendship and affection lose all the pure and chastened feelings of woman, and would be thought quite warm enough, both in matter and manner, did they issue from the lips or the pen, of the most enraptured inamorato. And in these inordinate efforts, rising in her mood to the mock sublime, she suddenly sinks again, from her inflated height, into the mirth-stirring bathos—thus making the "single step from the sublime to the ridiculous," as short as any author we remember, hardly excepting even the rhymster, who, from a wayward caracole of his Pegasus, said or sung, in his headlong tumble, the following couplet, of undying renown—

> "And thou, Dalhousie, Mighty God of War,
> Lieutenant Colonel to the Earl of Mar!!"

For a striking instance of this *attempt* at rising, but *success* only in falling, we may refer our readers to the "lines on a miniature," which seem to have been written expressly to illustrate our remarks on this subject.

In common with most other writers of poetry, our authoress has a strong penchant for similies; and she has contrived to supply her readers with them in marvellous abundance, with the least possible variety; a few pet objects having furnished her with comparisons for every thing she wished to illustrate. In this, there would be at least ingenuity, and convenience, were there a single point of genuine analogy, between the objects or feelings reciprocally compared. But the very contrary is strikingly true, in a majority of instances, even where her meaning is fully comprehensible; and there are not a few cases, in which the

simile is so wild and extravagant, as to lose all definite meaning, in its immeasurable bombast. What, for example, is the meaning of the following preposterous congregation of words, taken from "The Young Lovers"—

> "She," (the lady-lover,) "half reclined upon a bed of flowers,
> And o'er her shoulder, *rainbow-like* there bended,
> A youth whose sighs with her warm breathings blended."

How this sighing swain resembled a *rainbow*, we are unable to perceive, unless he "bended" so far over the shoulder of the *half-reclining* damsel, as to assume the form of an arch or half circle; in which case, he must have stood upon his head, as well as upon his feet, and thus have placed himself in a *very peculiar*, awkward, and uncomfortable position, to say the least of it. And yet, if this undignified curvature were not the point of analogy, we can find no other between the *rainbow*, and the *beau* of the lady. But the comparison was considered a pretty *metaphor*; and that, with the poetess, covered all its faults.

One of her etherial friends has her locks compared to "*pellucid* gold." Now the aptitude of this simile, bizarre and enigmatical as it is, we are unable to controvert, from the fact, that we have never seen any gold of a "*pellucid*," i. e. of a *transparent* character—all of that metal which we have observed, having been unmistakably *opaque*.

There, are, also, in many of the poems, faults in rhythm, inelegant abbreviations, and grammatical inaccuracies. In consequence of the former, we are often obliged to lay the accent on the wrong word, or syllable, and sometimes even to mispronounce a word, in order to read the lines in the metre, in which the poetess intended to express them; for instance, in the following lines—

> "The bright rose, when faded,
> Flings forth o'er its tomb,
> Its fragrant leaves laded
> With silent perfume;"—

the word "perfume" must have the accent improperly laid on the last syllable, instead of the first, else in reading them, the rhythm and rhyme are marred.

Although it is allowable, in versification, occasionally to abbreviate words, yet it is true, and worthy of observation, that good writers do so as seldom as possible; and only, when it can be done gracefully, and

without disturbing the rythm. Our authoress, on the contrary, evidently deeming it a poetical prettyism, to use these clipt words, appears to have made it a study to introduce them, and often does so very awkwardly, and sometimes even unnecessarily and prejudicially, as respects the metre in which she is writing. "I'd," "'twould," "'twill," "'twere," "'twas," "flings't," "'neath," &c., are not, in themselves, either beautiful, or essential to poetry. It would have been much better therefore, had the authoress been more sparing in the use of them.

Of her errors in grammar, we shall point out a single instance; though others might be cited. In her "Sleeping Maiden," she says—

> Yes, very bright and very sweet,
> Those dreamings all must be;
> Or else they would not flit around
> A creature fair as *thee*."

But, to generalize no longer, we shall cease to speak of the faults of the poems *en masse*, and, turning to the work itself, specify the principal sources, whence our objections to it have arisen, in order that readers may judge for themselves, how far those objections are sustained by the references we shall make to individual poems, and by extracting from them passages, which we deem exceptionable in composition or matter—or in both united.

In the execution of this design, we shall notice first, as being most numerous, those we have spoken of as belonging to the Rosa-Matilda school. And, in doing so, we shall content ourselves with a very limited series of observations on a few of them, and with such short extracts from them, as may serve to illustrate those observations, and show them to be just.

We would here observe, not in the spirit of levity, but of truth, that a number of these poems are written in that ordinary style, so severely ridiculed by Dr. Johnson, when he offered to talk such poetry, for any length of time, and accordingly began—

> "And now, I pray thee, Renny dear,
> That thou wilt give to me,
> With cream and sugar softened well,
> Another dish of tea.
> And much expertness as thou hast,
> I'll bet thee half a crown,
> Thou canst not pour it out as fast,
> As I can gulp it down".

The first of those common-place effusions, we shall notice, is entitled "Melodia," and commences thus—

> "I met once in my girlish hours,
> A creature *soft* and *warm*." &c.

This poem consists of seven stanzas, of ten lines each, making in all *seventy lines*, from the whole of which we obtain only the *single* idea—more concisely expressed in the second line of the opening couplet—that Melodia, was "a creature *soft* and *warm*." Her eye was surpassingly *soft*, for—

> "It seemed a beauty set apart,
> For *softness* and for *sighs*;"

but, whether she *sighed with it*, or only caused others to sigh *by it*, we cannot well discover. But, be that as it may, her heart, as we are assured, was still softer—

> "But oh! Melodia's melting heart,
> Was *softer* than her eyes."

and her *spirit* was the *softest* of the entire trio of melting associates—for it "shed" all this *softness*, as a *producer*, while her eyes only spread it abroad, as COMMON LABORERS.

Again; "her bosom was a *soft* retreat"—and her face, was of a like consistence—for "beauty" had "*left*" on it, a "*soft* trace." This, however, is a sort of equivocal intimation, that "beauty" had deserted the "soft" being, else it could not have *left* a trace of any kind. And lastly, even her "*darts*," were *soft*, and "*tender*," and "*sweet*." Of course they could neither pierce, nor wound, but were doubtless so harmless, incollision with any thing as hard as most human hearts, that, not to rob them of their delicious sweetness, we may liken them, not inaptly, to little javelins of jelly. Nothing is said of the young lady's head; but the presumption is a fair one, that it also was of a piece with every thing else possessed by her—*soft* and spongy.

After reading, several times, the seventy lines, of which this poem consists, and embodying,in our own mind, all the perfections of the melting creature portrayed in them, we find but two modes of comparing her. The first is the same we should use with any other *adjective*, (for *substantive* we cannot even fancy her, because a substantive can

"stand alone," and she, we are confident, could not,) we must therefore compare her like other adjectives, by putting her through the several degrees—*soft, softer, softest.*

And, as respects the second mode, in the poverty of our imagination, all *soft* and *warm* as she was, we can think of nothing which she so much resembles, as that homely and somewhat insipid culinary preparation, denominated, in one form of parlance, "*Mush.*" And, if we add, in consideration of the sweetness of the entire being of Melodia, a seasoning of *molasses*, the simile will, in our own humble opinion, be quite as expressive, complete, and belles-lettres-like, as many of the analogous creations by the poetess herself.

In the last stanza we are told, that the beauty, which it is intimated had departed from Melodia's *face*, is "set" in the "*spirit*" of the poetess, there to— .

> "Live, until this *tender heart*,
> *On* which it lives is dead."

And there, we hope it may have a prolonged, and sweet existence. As Melodia is acknowledged to be "A thing unknown to fame," we confess, we see very little probability that either the poetess or ourselves, will be able to bestow upon her, any very enviable degree of renown; and, in despair of doing so, we take our final leave of her.

It is not necessary to examine, at full length, or to analyze critically, all, or any one entire poem of this class, in order to prove their indisputable title to the place we have assigned to them in the ranks of poesy. A verse, or stanza, taken at random, will sufficiently sustain our opinion; and, for absolute demonstration of the position, we have assumed, we refer the reader to the volume itself; merely directing his attention to such pieces as "Musings," "Lines to a lady," "Stanzas," "I weep not," and a number of similar effusions, making up at least one half of the book.

In pursuing the plan here proposed, we present our readers with the first stanza of "Musings," that they may judge for themselves:

> "I wandered out, one summer *night*,
> *'Twas* when my years were few,
> The wind was singing in the *light*,
> And I was singing too;
> The *sunshine* lay upon the *hill*,
> The shadow in the vale,
> And here and there, a *leaping rill*,
> Was *laughing* on the gale."

After being informed, (on the authority, we presume, of poetic license,) that this was a SUN-SHINY night, the reader will not be surprised to learn that other matters of wonderment were witnessed by the young lady, in her wanderings; such as some "waves" with "dimpled hands," and others with "dimpled faces"—the latter "leaping upon the air," and each catching "a star in its embrace," &c., &c., &c.

We will add another stanza from this poem, as triumphantly empty and *common-place*, as if it had been intended, by the authoress, to illustrate that particular style of composition:

"I heard the laughing wind behind,
A playing with my hair,
The *breezy fingers* of the wind,
How cool and moist they were;
I heard the *night-bird* warbling o'er,
Its soft, enchanting strain,
I never heard such sounds before,
And never shall again."

This reminds us, not a little, of Peter Pindar's mock apostrophe to the lips of the Princess Augusta, of England:

"Those beauteous lips, unstained by satire's gall,
Lips that I *never kissed*—and *never shall.*

From "I weep not," we take the following specimen of "milk and water:

"Nor do my lips e'er part,
With whispers of thy name;
But thou art shrined in this *hushed heart*,
And that is all the same."

"I have a fair and gentle friend," furnishes us with the scrap of balderdash here inserted:

"For every tear that gems her eye,
From *her young bosom flows*,
Like dew-drops from a *golden star*,
Or *perfume from a rose.*"

And with this exquisite *bit of nonsense*, we shall close our extracts of the purely *common-place*.

We have before remarked that our authoress is constantly tempted to sing too much, and in too exalted a strain of herself. And, in further confirmation of this fact, we subjoin the following, from her poem addressed to her "Freed Bird." After telling him that her "*mild* spirit"

is desirous of "*springing*" from its "temple" to join him, in his heaven-ward career, she thus sings of herself:

> "And yet, sweet bird, *bright thoughts* to me are given,
> As *many* as the *clustering leaves* in June,
> And my *young heart* is like a *harp of heaven*,
> *Forever strung* unto some *pleasant tune*,
> And *my soul burns with wild, poetic fire;* &c., &c.

And she closes this poem, by telling us, that her—

> —"Free thoughts have ever spurned control,
> Since this heart held a wish, or this frail form a soul."

In plain English—ever since she was born. And that is probably the reason why she now can neither restrain her thoughts within the bounds of nature, in describing, nor clothe them in words of distinct, and either controlling or controlled signification.

In one of her poems to "the Stars," she tells us that, "sweet religion's *holy wing*," has filled her "spirit" with "pure, *heavenly* bliss," and proves her assertion, by the following half amatory, half pious effusion:

> "For ne'er since *love's soft raptures o'er me stole*,
> When first his young existence *dawned in sighs*,
> Have I e'er felt such *fulness* in my *soul*,
> Such depths of *softness* at my *heart* and *eyes*,
> As I now feel, upon this *dewey* sod,
> Pondering, with *holy awe*, the wond'rous works of God."

And yet, her *holy awe* suggests, to her imagination, nothing more sublime or heavenly, than the stanza commencing:

> "Ye" (the stars) "bring the time when *happy lovers meet*," &c.

But we forbear to notice any more of these blissful ponderings.

On reflecting how much the poetess lies out at night, on the "*dewey sod*," and "wanders" in *damp*, though *flowery* paths, and "sits amid' her "flowers," for "long uncounted hours," looking at the "stars," and pining for some one she never knew, we are almost tempted to believe the lady herself to be a dew-and-star-light-drinking flower—and that she is refreshed by all this dewey-dampness, otherwise—to borrow, with a slight alteration, the question of Hotspur:

> "How 'scapes she *agues*, in Apollo's name?"

As specimens of the transcendentally sentimental, in which our authoress so peculiarly delights, we recommend to our readers, "The Young Lovers," "The broken-hearted," "He came too late," "Oh, had we only met," "I know thee not," "Hopeless love," &c., &c., &c.

The last named poem closes with the following stanza, which may be considered a fair specimen of the whole trashy production:

"*Ah me!* such *blissful* hopes once filled my bosom,
And dreams of fame could then my heart enthrall,
And joy and *bliss* around me seemed to blossom,
But these *blissful* hopes are blighted—all;
No *smiling Angel* decks these Eden-bowers,
No ringing footstep echoes mine in glee;
Oh! I am weary in this *land of flowers*,
I sigh—I sigh amid them all—*ah me!*"

And *oh me!* also—poor fellow! *Sir Walter* must have had him in his mind, when *he* wrote of Wilfred:

"*Vainly* he loved—for *seldom swain*,
Of *such soft mould* is loved again."

The whole tenor of this rhapsody, as well as that of others of a like character, recalls so forcibly to our mind, an ancient "love song," that we are tempted to present our readers with a verse or two from it, in order that they may observe in it, the same *pretty epithets* and *kindred thoughts*, which our authoress here so felicitously displays. It commences thus:

"*Fluttering*, spread thy purple pinions,
Gentle Cupid, o'er my heart,
I, a slave in thy dominions,
Nature must give way to *art*.

Mild Arcadians, ever blooming,
Nightly nodding o'er your flocks;
See my weary days consuming,
All beneath *yon flowery rocks*.

Mournful cypress, verdant willow,
Gilding my Aurelia's brow;
Morpheus, hovering o'er my pillow,
Hear me pay my dying vow.

Gloomy Pluto, king of terrors,
Arm'd in adamantine chains,
Lead me to the crystal mirrors,
Watering soft Elysian plains.

Thus when Philomela drooping,
Softly seeks her silent mate,
See the bird of Juno stooping,
Melody resigns to fate."

This is entitled "*a love song in the modern taste,*" and was composed more than *a hundred years ago,* by one who pronounc ed it such a production, as "might have been written by a person of quality." But we confess, *we* see no good reason why it *might not* have been the production of our authoress, and, under precisely the same title, have made one in her collection of poems; so strikingly similar is it, in conception and execution, to many pieces contained in the volume we are examining.

But we shall bring our strictures to a close, soon after the examination of one poem more—"The Rainbow;" which, from its prominent position in the volume, as well as from the fact, that it furnishes both the frontispiece and its motto, seems to be presented to us, as the "choice and master" specimen of the powers of the authoress. And admitting it to be so, we shall endeavor to show, that our objections to the poems *generally,* are equally as well-founded, and therefore as defensible, when urged against even this evidently favorite production.

But, before commencing our analysis of "The Rainbow," we deem it proper, briefly to specify some of the leading elements of *poetry.* Without such a specification, we may be liable, in some particulars, to be misunderstood.

Poetry is not, as it is too generally supposed to be, identical with mere fancy-work, or fiction. Though, when governed by judgment and taste, the imagination and the fancy may be properly and advantageously employed in it.

The term has been correctly defined to mean, a *faithful delineation of nature,* (especially in her most striking and attractive features and qualities,) in measured and appropriate language, usually and most fitly, but not *necessarily* in either rhyme, or blank verse.

Truthfulness, in the representation of all things—objects, events, causes, sentiment, feeling, and every other attribute or phenomenon, whether of mind or matter, is as essential to poetry, as to any other sort of composition.

Though the poet may imagine and describe objects, actions, and scenes, that have never existed, they must be such alone as might have existed, without any violation of, or departure from, the laws, or ordinary course of nature.

Or, if the creations of the poet, be so placed, or endowed by his fancy, that they could not have had an actual existence, they must,

nevertheless, if described in detail, be congruous in all their parts, and be made to resemble something that has been, or might be the product of a natural course of action, or the result of natural feelings. And thus, at last, must he draw from the store-house of nature, all the elements of his imagery and scenery; and he must never unite them in an unnatural manner.

So essential and vital to genuine poetry are such considerations and observances as these, that, in their boldest fictions, the high sons of song have never neglected them. This truth, were it necessary, could be easily proved, by a reference to what are regarded as the most unbridled flights of imagination, by Chaucer, Spencer, or Milton, or even by Shakespeare himself; when, glancing with his phrenzied eye, "from Heaven to earth, and from earth to Heaven," he embodied, in his creations, whatever met his view.

By these tests, then, we shall now proceed to try the poetry of the much admired "Rainbow;" and if *it* prove to be little else than a *glitter* of objects, a *jingle* of words, and an incongruity of representation and thought, an analytical examination of the inferior poems of the volume would be a waste of time, and will not therefore be attempted by us.

In commencing our analysis, we present our readers with the first stanza of that brag-poem of the volume:

> "I sometimes have thoughts in my loneliest hours,
> That lie on my heart like the *dew* on the *flowers*,
> Of a ramble I took one bright afternoon,
> When my heart was as light as a blossom in June;
> The green earth was moist with the late fallen *showers*,
> The breeze fluttered down and blew open the *flowers*,
> While a *single white cloud*, to its haven of rest,
> On the *white wing of peace*, *floated* off in the *west*."

In this stanza we are told, as the reader perceives, that the poetess is thinking of a ramble she "took one *bright* afternoon, (and be it remembered that the afternoon *was* bright,) the ground was wet, as it always was, either with rain or dew, whenever she walked out—by day or by night. The *sun*, of course, was in the *west*, "while a *single* white cloud," the only one in the sky, "floated off in the *west*," *also*. The propriety of its being "floated" there, "on the white wing of peace," is not very apparent; nor do we remember ever before to have heard it suggested that clouds *have* a haven of *rest* any where, inas-

much as, while they exist, they are perpetually in *motion*. If they have, however, such a haven, our authoress is wise in selecting the *west* for it; because that word rhymes well with *rest;* and that is the only reason we can discover for the arrangement.

But, we would ask, do clouds ever appear *white* in the *west*, when the sun is also in that quarter of the heavens? We are inclined to think not—we have often gazed admiringly on the western clouds exhibiting, towards evening, almost *all* the gorgeous colors of the rainbow. But a "*white cloud*," under such circumstances of time and place, we do not at present remember to have witnessed.

The only defect in the metre, that we notice in this poem, occurs in the third line of the first stanza; and it is throughout plentifully sprinkled with those pretty, glittering words, in which the poetess so much delights.

But we will proceed to the next stanza:

> "As I threw back my *tresses* to catch the cool *breeze*,
> That scattered the rain-drops and *dimpled the seas*,
> *Far up the blue sky*, a fair rainbow *unrolled*,
> Its soft-tinted *pinions* of purple and gold."

From these lines we learn several singular occurences—that "*the seas*" were "*dimpled*" by "the *breeze*," which was, notwithstanding, but a gentle one. We are not sure, whether the authoress means by the "seas," to indicate a plurality of *oceans*, or even of less important "seas;" or whether she speaks in seaman's phrase, and alludes to those foam-crested billows, which are nautically termed "seas." Most probably she means to apply the term to an indefinite portion of the broad Atlantic. But in whatever sense she employs the word, it is manifestly absurd to talk of "the seas," or Atlantic ocean, as being "dimpled" by a "*fluttering*," "*flower-opening breeze*."

We are next informed that, as the poetess "threw back her tresses," "a fair rainbow unrolled" its "purple and gold *pinions*," *far up the blue sky*."—an event presenting, certainly, one of the most extraordinary phenomena on record. A rainbow, that "airy child of *vapor* and the *sun*," appeared *far* up the *blue* vault of heaven—without the presence of a single natural cause, from which the splendid meteor could possibly arise!! For, as the reader will remember, there was but *one* cloud (a *white* one) in the sky, and that was in the *west*, where the *sun* was naturally sinking to *his* rest; for it was in the after-

noon. And we are given clearly to understand, that there was, at that time, neither rain, cloud, nor vapor, to obscure, or disturb the heavenly serenity; for the "afternoon" was "*bright*," and the "*sky*" was "*blue*." Yet, in despite of all these adverse circumstances, our authoress sees—not in that part of the hemisphere, opposite to the declining sun, where alone a rainbow could have appeared—but "*far up the blue sky*," immediately over her head, a *miraculous rainbow*. Nor do we give it this title, only because of its existence being independent of natural causes. It had attached to it other peculiarities, which excite our astonishment. It "*unrolled*" a pair of wings—i. e.—"pinions of purple and gold."

Now, were we speaking of an ordinary rainbow, formed in the usual manner, we should here object, that, in the unity of its perfect arch, there was nothing which could, with the shadow of propriety, be denominated *wings*. But, as this was evidently a creation of the poetess, manufactured exclusively for her own use and benefit, we shall not presume to say with what strange and pretty appendages she might not have decorated it. The manner, moreover, in which these glittering *attaches* were displayed, was no less peculiar. The bow "*unrolled*" them. Now, no other winged creature, as we verily believe, whether of nature, or imagination, ever opened its pinions in such an out of the way and preposterous manner.

But we must add still more to the wonders of this celestial pageant, by continuing our authoress's description of it:

> "'Twas *born in a moment*, yet, quick as its birth,
> It had stretched to the *uttermost ends of the earth*,
> And fair as an Angel it *floated as free*,
> With a *wing* on the *earth*, and a *wing* on the *sea*."

Its *momentary* birth seems scarcely less a matter of surprise, than its causeless production, when we consider, that, in that single "moment," it "unrolled" a pair of wings of such "*prodigious*" dimensions, as to reach to the "*uttermost ends of earth ! !*" We have certainly seen a rainbow, which, in a very short space, presented its whole brilliant arch to our eyes; but it was formed in the natural manner, by the refraction and reflection of the sun's rays, by a cloud, or falling rain. Nor did it extend beyond the easy ken of our corporeal vision.

Of this rainbow, a further marvel is, that it was not only "fair as an Angel," but that it also "*floated as free*." And this is another

palpable blunder. For it is a manifest absurdity to speak of a rainbow, formed by nature, as a "*floating* meteor. It does not even *seem* to float. Its colors indeed, deepen, blend, and fade; but, during its brief period of duration, it spans its parent cloud, on which it appears, as immoveable in position, as it is magnificent in form and color; thus reminding us, at once, of the steadfastness and glory of that "promise," of which it is the fitting and glorious type.

But had this rainbow *been* even the Angel to which it is compared, it could not possibly have "*floated free*," awkwardly encumbered as it was, "with a *wing* on the *earth*, and a *wing* on the *sea*." And, as it reached to "the *uttermost ends* of the *earth*," running in the natural direction of north and south; one "*wing*" probably rested on "Terra del Fuego," and the other on an ice-berg on the "Arctic ocean. Thus fearfully *wing-bound*, we are compelled to consider the *freedom* of its "*floating*," to be somewhat more restricted than that of an "Angel."

As there was no possibility that nature, acting in conformity to her unchangeable laws, *could* have formed the rainbow in question, we are forced into the alternative of attributing its creation to some "witchery" of the poetess herself; and, as that creation was simultaneous with the "*throwing back of her tresses*," we leave it to the imaginations of our readers, to connect the playful grace of that act, with the production of the miraculous bow, which, at the same instant, arched her fair head with so celestial a bandeau.

But to proceed:

> "How calm was the ocean, how gentle its swell,
> Like a woman's soft bosom it rose and it fell,
> While its light, sparkling waves stealing *laughingly* o'er,
> When *they saw the* fair rainbow, *knelt down* on the shore;
> No sweet hymn ascended, no murmur of prayer,
> Yet I felt that the *spirit* of worship was there,
> And bent my *young head* in devotion and love,
> 'Neath the form of *the Angel*, that *floated above*."

Here, we regret to say, that we cannot approve of the simile contained in the first couplet of this stanza, especially as the product of a female pen. And as the ground of our disapprobation must be obvious to every one, we forbear making any further comment on the subject.

The couplet that follows, being somewhat obscure, we are uncertain, what it was that the "light sparkling waves" stole laughingly o'er. We suppose, however, that it was "the shore;" for, we are told, that

they *knelt down* on that queer and homely sort of a cushion, *when they* "*saw* the rainbow."

Had we not received the scrap of intelligence, of their having previously exercised the power of vision, we should have considered their *kneeling down*, as a feat sufficiently comical for waves to be made to perform, even in poetic fiction. But, thus informed, we regard their posture as in very good keeping with the whole unnatural and fantastical scene. We confess our wonder, however, that the poetess did not find, in the voice of the ocean, something to liken to a hymn or a prayer; as she might have done with sufficient poetical propriety and aptness. For the ocean has a voice, which, though tremendous in its wrath, is, in its calmer mood, often solemn and soft enough, for either prayer or praise.

Without even fancying their aid, however, the authoress *felt* that the "*spirit* of worship was there," and, seeing the *waves kneeling devoutly before her*, she might have added, with perfect propriety—the *form* also.

Thus impressed, she bent her "young head," in devotion and love, 'neath the form of the *Angel*, that "*floated* above." Here is a new wonder, which may account for some of those that had preceded it.

We have shewn that this rainbow was of preternatural formation; but the whole extent of the miracle, was not at first revealed to us. We were told indeed, that it was "fair as an Angel," but we now discover, that it was *itself* an Angel, which it would seem had assumed this radiant form, in order to delight, without overawing, the all-appreciating rambler. This fact being admitted, all incongruities cease, of course, to be of any importance; inasmuch as an *Angel* is under no obligation to consult the natural laws of time, place, or circumstance.

Before reading this eclaircisement, we had begun to account for the bow's appearance mythologically, by fancying that Juno had sent a message to the poetess, and that Iris, her hand-maiden and message-bearer, had thus sprung from the "dimpled seas," "far up the blue sky"—to deliver it, with all due ceremony, in her full Olympian court-dress, of "soft tinted purple and gold."

We will continue our examination of the poem thus—

> "How wide was the sweep of its beautiful *wings*,
> How *boundless* its circle, how radiant its rings;

If I looked on the sky, 'twas suspended in air.
If I looked on the ocean, the rainbow was there;
Thus forming a girdle *as brilliant* and *whole*,
As the *thoughts of the rainbow*, that circled my soul,
Like the wing of the Deity, calmly unfurled,
It bent from the *cloud*, and encircled the world."

In this stanza, the poetess reverts once more to the "beautiful wings" of the bow, *sans rain*, and tells us, that its circle was *boundless*. Yet every one knows, that the most perfect rainbow, is wholly a *local* object; while a single glance easily embraces the entire arch. And so near to us, do the ends of the bow appear to be, that a little child may be induced to undertake a journey to one of them, to obtain the "pot of gold," which is fabulously said to be hidden there.

But we will not find fault where it is possible to avoid it. We therefore admit, that, to the limited perception, and the exaggerated imagination of our authoress, it may have *appeared* "boundless."

We are next told of the bow, that "'twas suspended in *air*;" and this seems hardly compatible with our previous information, that it had a "*wing* on the *earth*, and a *wing* on the *sea*." For, while thus *resting* on the two most ponderable of the elements, it cannot with propriety be admitted, that it was "suspended in *air*, which is one of the lightest. The bow was also on the ocean, and thus formed "a girdle," or ring, both "brilliant" and "*whole*." But this conflicts again with the idea of its being "*boundless*;" for the perfect circle the authoress talks about, could not have even *appeared* to be so.

Again, the girdle is declared to have been "*whole*;" yet the "ocean rose and fell," was "dimpled by the breeze," and had "light sparkling waves" on its surface. For these reasons, it was natural for us to expect to hear, that the rainbow, reflected from the water, was broken into thousands of brilliant fragments; as, under such circumstances, must inevitably have been the case.

There *is* however, somewhat of an abatement of the perfection of this "girdle." It was only "*as* brilliant and *whole*" as the "*thoughts of the rainbow*," that "*circled* the soul" of the poetess. And we have no difficulty in admitting, that it might easily have been so; for we are constrained to declare, that "the thoughts of the rainbow," which our authoress has expressed in this poem, are, in every particular, incongruous, disjointed, and unnatural. How such thoughts, therefore, could, by any contrivance or contingency, have "*circled*" her soul, we cannot

pretend either to explain, to comprehend, or even to conjecture. We are most inclined, however, to suspect, that the strange enigma was neither more nor less, than one of those "deep and solemn mysteries of the soul," to the study of which, the poetess, as we are assured, by one of the most enthusiastic admirers of her genius and its effusions, is ardently devoted.

So numerous and glaring are the inconsistencies and self-contradictions, in this stanza, to which we have already referred, that a feeling of kindness and compassion toward the poetess, forbids us openly to expose any more of them. We hope, therefore, that our readers have, of themselves, discovered, that the "Rainbow," at first, "suspended in air, far up the *blue* sky," is here so far remodeled, and metamorphosed, in its position and bearing, by its fair creatress, as to be attached to her "*white cloud in the west*," from which it very marvellously "bent, and encircled the world!!"

Of the simile in the last couplet of the stanza, we shall only observe, that a *single wing*, though (to speak with reverence) even of the Deity, cannot, with any propriety of language, much less with *truth*, be spoken of as *encircling* "the world" or any thing else.

But we will resume our quotations:

> "There are moments, *I think*, when the spirit receives,
> Whole volumes of thought on its unwritten leaves,
> When the folds of the heart, *in a moment unclose*,
> Like the *innermost leaves* from the heart of the rose.
> And thus, when the rainbow had passed from the sky,
> The thoughts it awoke were too deep to pass by;
> It left *my full soul*, like *the wing* of *a dove*,
> All *fluttering* with *pleasure*, and *fluttering* with *love*."

In the first line of this stanza, there is a fault, that cannot easily escape the notice of any reader of judgment and taste. The expression "*I think*" is somewhat too personal, as well as too colloquial. The sentiment, in the couplet, in which this homespun phrase occurs, does not belong to the poetess alone, but is familiar to thousands; while her egotistical parade of the first person is in very bad taste.

In the second couplet, we have one of those *pretty* similies, which want *nothing* but *aptitude*, and *significancy*, to render them illustrative. The present one is, for several reasons, as useless as it is unmeaning. In no respect is the rose emblematical of the *sudden* opening of the human heart. It is not a flower that blooms in a "*mo-*

ment;" nor do any of its leaves, whether "*innermost,*" middle, or outermost, ever, like the cup of the "evening primrose," open instantaneously. When, therefore, "the *folds* of the *heart in a moment* unclose," they are as *unlike* those "*innermost* leaves," as they are to a mouse-trap, or a pair of spring snuffers, which fly suddenly *shut* instead of *open*.

We are next told, that "when the rainbow had passed from the sky," it awoke thoughts in the poetess "*too deep* to pass by;" and her "*soul*" "full" of those *deep*, *devotional* feelings, she compares to "the *wing* of a *dove*—all fluttering with *pleasure*, and fluttering with *love*"—making thus a *perfect climax* in *absurdity* and *false taste*.

No soul, *deeply* impressed with sentiments of "devotion," and pious "love," and irresistibly impelled to bend either the "head," or the knee, under their all-powerful and solemnizing influence, *ever* yet experienced *one sensation*, of that sickly sentimentality, which may be aptly illustrated by the figure of a pigeon-wing—all *fluttering* with pleasure and love. Indeed, this *fluttering* of the "wing" of the "bird of *Venus*," is illustrative of nothing higher, or purer, than the palpitating delight and romantic trepidation, with which a sentimental school-girl breaks the perfumed seal of her first rose-colored billet-doux. An affectation of *common* sentiment is sufficiently ridiculous; but even the appearance of an affectation of *devotion* is positively offensive. To continue—

> "I know that *each moment* of rapture or pain,
> But shortens *the links* of life's mystical chain;
> I know that *my form*, *like* that *bow from* the *wave*,
> Must pass from the earth, and lie cold in the grave;
> Yet, O! when death's shadow my bosom encloud,
> When I shrink at the thought of the coffin and shroud;
> May hope, like the rainbow, my spirit enfold,
> In her beautiful pinions of purple and gold."

The last stanza (just quoted) opens with an attempt at a philosophical reflection, which, though by no means new, is expressed in a somewhat novel manner.

Our authoress meditatingly tells us in it, that *she knows*, "that *each* moment of *rapture* or *pain*" (of herself, of course—and we doubt not, of the less transcendental sensations of ordinary mortals also) "but shortens *the links* (i. e. *every link*) in life's mystical chain."

Now, the poetess here designed to state a common-place *truism*; but

she has either failed to express her genuine meaning; or her philosophism has led her into the commission of an awkward blunder. *Each moment* that passes does not *shorten every link*, nor even a *single link* of the chain of life. It merely takes *one link* from it, and thus shortens the *chain itself*, leaving all the links, that remain, of their natural length.

This little blunder is followed by another dash of rhetoric equally outre. The authoress says that *her* "form, like that bow from the wave," "must pass from the earth and lie cold in the grave." Now, in this comparison, sentimental and solemn as it is intended to be, we can positively perceive neither accuracy, fitness, nor meaning. The bow fades quickly from the sky and wave, and is gone, we know not whither. The *form* of the poetess, however, we do opine, will not thus prismatically *fade* from our admiring eyes, but will, (long hereafter, as we earnestly hope) be borne to some flower-clad and bird-frequented spot, and consigned, with sad and solemn ceremonial—"ashes to ashes—dust to dust." And thus, the *passage* of her "form from the earth," can be, in no single particular (the fact of departure itself excepted) like that of "the bow from the wave." Nor did the bow, as we venture to presume, after vanishing from the wave, "lie cold in the grave," or in any other place, as her form will do. And thus is the simile, in every particular, as grossly inappropriate, as it is *pretending* and *inflated*. If the lady meant merely to say, that she knew she must die and be buried, she told a well-known and momentous truth; but she spoiled the simplicity and solemnity of that truth, by her unsuccessful attempt, to liken her *form* and fate, to the "*form*" and fate "of the *Angel* that floated above."

In the four concluding lines, the wish and comparison are sufficiently unexceptionable; and, if they were not so, the fault could not be attributed to the poetess; for neither of them owes its origin to her. The rainbow has been used as the symbol of *hope*, in all ages, and by numerous writers, both in prose and verse, ever since it was first represented, in the Old Testament, as "the bow of promise," and "token of the covenant."

We have thus endeavored to give a full and fair analysis of this poem; and, in doing so, we have shewn it, if we mistake not, to be destitute of every attribute *essential* to *true* poetry. If tried, as a test, by the definition of poetry heretofore given (the justice and propriety of

which, we believe to be incontrovertible) we shall find it strikingly deficient, in all the most important characteristics of that form of composition.

In "delineations of nature," the authoress, as has been already made to appear, is preposterously unfaithful—representing the production of natural phenomena (a fault very often repeated in the volume before us) without the operation of a single natural cause. And there is an equal want of correctness, in her descriptions of the commonest objects, to each of which, she, in turn, attributes some appearance, quality, or action, as foreign from truthfulness, as the act itself is unlicensed in the wildest flight of poetic fancy. And if the objects, attempted to be here presented to us, be wholly incongruous, the ideas of the writer, are no less unconnected and irreconcilable with each other. There is scarcely a single stanza in the poem, the revelations of which do not conflict with those of some other, or, even of itself; and, though most of the poetess's attempts at simile result in lamentable failures, as far as they are designed for an illustration of her meaning; yet do they very aptly illustrate *our* remark, that she is essentially destitute of all just perception of analogy, and therefore unable to institute, with each other, comparisons of things, with any degree of aptitude or propriety.

And we would further observe, that, as all the elements and circumstances of this poem are forced and unnatural, it *necessarily* follows, that the feelings which they might be supposed to have awakened in the authoress, should appear to the reader to be, in a like degree, overstrained and unreal.

We were forcibly struck, by a remark, relative to these poems, made by a sprightly and intelligent lady, on whom we called, some time after their publication. The volume was lying on her table, and, in reply to our questions, "whether she was fond of poetry, and what she thought of that she had been reading? She observed, "that she had always been a great lover of poetry, but as she was advanced in years, she supposed she had got behind the taste of the age, and that *poetry* was not now, the same thing that it was when she was young—"for," she quietly added, "I cannot say I admire these poems; for indeed, I cannot tell what most of them mean." In her estimation of "the Rainbow," we found that she fully concurred in the opinion of that poem, which we had ourselves previously noted down; and she, with a degree of good-natured archness, subjoined—"I never, in my life,

saw a rainbow like that described here. Every one I have seen, was connected with a *cloud*, and not suspended in air, in the clear blue sky; and why the good lady should have tacked a pair of wings on the rainbow, unless it was to make it look like the angel, to which she whimsically compared it, I am sure I cannot tell."

In examining thus critically into the claim, which these poems have, to be rightfullly considered what they have been proclaimed to be—"the best ever published by an American authoress"—we have been actuated solely by a sincere desire to aid in the formation of a just and impartial estimate of their character. And it has given us, instead of pleasure, feelings of an opposite description, to ascertain the fact, and to feel constrained to declare it, that, so far from having any just title to the front rank, so unwisely assigned to them, they fall far below the productions of almost any one of our countrywomen, who is at all distinguished in the walks of poesy. And, although it is with reluctance, and even painful emotion, that we call the attention of our readers to the subject, we yet consider it but common justice to the other poetesses of America, to assert, that the sterling merit of many of their productions cannot, with either taste or becomingness, be consigned to a secondary position, in regard to effusions in every respect so far inferior to them, as are the "Poems by Amelia." Nor can readers, of sound judgment, and cultivated taste, be thus blinded by the false and tinsel glare of these fragments of Moore's "Feast of Roses"—mere scraps and shreds of viands, promiscuously gathered, and fulsomely served up, after the "magic spell," which the "Enchantress" wove, had faded from lute, and gem, and flower.

Another yet more weighty reason for our present disagreeable duty, is, that, in encouraging and cultivating a taste for American literature, it is desirable and important, that we should make our standard of excellence as lofty and substantial, as the materials for its construction are abundant and valuable. No inferiority should be suffered to mar and deface the fabric. In erecting it, we should look beyond the pretty *littlenesses* of "dew drops," "rills," "roses," and "song-birds," and the mere twang of rhyme—as "love and dove," "seas and breeze," "wings and rings"—and require of those who are to minister to the advancement of the taste, and the improvement of the literature, of our age and country, *something* at least of intellectual strength—of original, intelligibe, and connected thought, and of natural imagery, pre-

sented to us in the language of high-wrought and truthful description. An to these requirements, should be added the possession of feeling and sentiment—deep, natural, fervent, and moral—clothing themselves in words, which, from their intuitive fitness, and resistless force, convince us at once of their truth and intensity; and, addressing themselves to the understanding, as well as to the heart, excite our admiration for the power of the writers, while we sympathise in their emotions.

Nor is it more advisable for the readers of America to have a high standard, and a refined condition of taste, than it is for her poets, and other authors, to fix their eyes on the loftiest pinnacle of the Temple of Fame, and indefatigably strive for its attainment. Let our writers be no longer content with ingloriously seating themselves on the lowest of the steps, that lead to the vestibule of that time-honored fabric. Let them be no longer tolerant of the occupancy of that unenviable station, and of the puerile practice of crowning, each one himself, or his humble associate, with evanescent and valueless wreaths of stunted bays—or road-side flowers.

Our poets (for it is of them alone that we are now about to speak) should be prevented, by discountenance and discouragement, from imitating the trite sentimentalisms of the amatory poets of *other countries*, and induced to draw their inspiration and matter of song, from nature, as she is revealed to us, in *our own*.

America is full of the native objects, and of the spirit of poetry—not indeed of the graves of great poets, those hallowed shrines. where posterity offers up her tribute of admiration and homage—nor of scenes made immortal by their genius and song. But our country abounds in such scenes of beauty, sublimity and grandeur, and in such associations with the mysterious past, the exciting and ennobling present, and the boundless and prophetic future, as might well inspire strains as lofty, and, in every respect, as worthy of the admiration of posterity, as those of the most cherished bard of the old world.

Who, possessed of a mind to discriminate, feel, and appreciate what is set before it, will deny, that such inspiration is to be found in the contemplation of our country's towering mountains, majestic rivers, wide-spreading prairies, and limitless lakes—in the roar of her cataracts, and in the soft beauty of her thousand forms of scenery, enchantingly diversified by hill and dale, gushing fountain, crystal streamlet, and sylvan shade—in the glittering frost-work of her northern winters,

and in the balmy breath of her southern orange-groves, offering, at once, the rich treasures of their golden fruit, and the delicious fragrance of their fresh-opening flowers—in the dark tornado, spreading death and desolation in its path—and in the gorgeous pageantry of clouds that decorate her skies, when the orb of day issues in glory from his portals in the east, or slowly descends, in solemn splendor, to his repose in the west; and, finally, in the depths of her dense primeval forests, that have withstood, for centuries, the assaults of the tempest, and the sappings of time? Nor are these the only Helicons and Hippocrenes our country contains.

Besides being rich in mysterious mementoes of a race of the human family, long since extinct, that stir the fancy, and invite to romantic speculation, far-reaching, bold, and mystical conjecture, and antiquarian research, America has her present race of Red men, who have long made her solitudes their home; and who present, in their wars, and loves, their peculiar character, their general history, and their future fate, a boundless store of material, as rich and deep in poetic interest, for both the heart and the imagination, as any other people ever afforded.

Nor is it alone in the physical beauty and sublimity of their country, that our poets may find their sources of inspiration. Her history is replete with romantic incident, and deeds of moral grandeur, compared with which, the creations of fiction fade into insignificance. Such are thousands of the acts of noble daring, that would have graced and glorified the palmiest days of Greek and Roman gallantry—or even the reign of chivalry itself—performed alike by the high-souled Cavalier, the stern and resolute Puritan, and their equally dauntless and adventurous descendant—the hardy Pioneer of the west.

The annals, moreover, of every little colony, can furnish instances of individual achievement, heroic endurance, and generous self-sacrifice, worthy of being the theme of the poet's most high-wrought and enthusiastic strains.

Nor are our records wanting in the softer legends, of the deep and hallowed love, faithfulness and patriotism of woman; always sincere, unchanging, and devoted—and of the thousand arduous adventures, and disinterested sacrifices to which they have given rise.

We need hardly say, that among the sources of proud inspiration, for our native bards, are the countless noble acts and endurances of

Washington and his band of revolutionary heroes—and also, the deeds of unsurpassed valor, of our land and naval forces, in the late war of our country's glory—in which the chosen cohorts of Wellington fled before American prowess, and in which the all-conquering naval flag of England, which had haughtily "Braved a thousand years, the battle and the breeze"—was compelled to strike, to our young country's banner, whose new-fledged Eagle had just stretched her wings in her first lofty and daring flight from the eyry.

And certainly there is, in these records of the past, enough of the softness of sentiment, as well as of the moral sublime, to incite the poets of America, to celebrate them in lays, worthy, at once, of such high, romantic, and spirit-stirring themes, and of their own love and genius for song. But we must bring to a close this article, already protracted far beyond the limits we had assigned to it.

Although as a just and impartial critic, we have been obliged to point out many faults in the "Poems by Amelia," too palpable to be passed over, we are nevertheless persuaded, that their authoress, by exercising her judgment more, and her yet undisciplined fancy less, can produce a poem superior to any, or even to all in the volume before us.

But, in order to do this, she must forget *herself*, as well as her *favorite phrases*, and *pretty* words, and thoroughly imbue her mind with her subject; trusting to truth and consistency alone, for the sympathies and admiration of her readers. Thus let her give expression to her natural feelings, in language forcible and equally natural, and therefore, more pleasing and poetical, than any thing can be, that savors of either extravagance or affectation.

We have formed this opinion of her capabilities, from those of her poems, in which she has apparently made no effort to shine. In her "Green mossy bank," the sentiments, though simple, are natural; and the imagery is such as *may have* existed; while we sympathize equally with the sports of the *child*, and the retrospective longing of the *woman*, for a return to its careless innocence.

We wish, by the bye, that her engraver had represented the poetess as a pretty, curly-haired, rosy-cheeked child, "Flinging up the cool drops," from the fountain described in that poem—"Till (her) small naked feet, were all bathed in bright dew." Such a conception would have been in far better taste, than the spiritless, and unmeaning creation of fancy, which he has given as a frontispiece. In the representa-

tion here suggested, every one would have admired the playful little girl, recognized the naturalness of her pastime, and commended the apt conception of the artist.

There are lines again, to "The little step-son," which, making no pretension to a high order of poetry, are pretty, and have some merit, on account of the kind and natural feeling they express.

"Thou canst not forget me," is, perhaps, as a whole, one of the very best productions in the volume. The thought is continuous and connected, and generally natural, and not badly expressed.

In the first stanza "To Time," there is strength and loftiness of both thought and expression; and, had the authoress sustained herself throughout the effort, as she commenced it, that poem must have ranked as her best production. But, as soon as she began to talk of "*love-thrills*," her strength and sublimity left her, and the poem ends in her oft-repeated figures of "*ripples*" and "*dimples*."

"Pulpit Eloquence," though in some parts too closely *imitative*, and in others, exhibiting somewhat too much of the poetess's penchant for the love-lorn, is, perhaps, one of the most unexceptionable of her poems.

We would also place among her respectable poems, the lines to "The American Sword." Yet it must be conceded, that the degree of favorable estimation, with which we are inclined to view that production, arises rather from the cherished associations which it calls up, and the feeling of patriotism expressed in it, than from any uncommon merit in the poem itself. It may therefore be sufficient to say of it (and it may be truly said) that the *subject* consecrates the poem, rather than that the poem elevates the subject, or even approaches its intrinsic glory.

There are likewise a few other whole pieces, and a number of single stanzas, which, though all more or less tinctured with the faults of the poetess's prevailing taste, show, nevertheless, with sufficient clearness, that she has tact and talent in versification, and no ordinary perception and appreciation of a certain sort of the *beautiful* in nature.

We think, moreover, that we perceive in her poems *occasional* evidence of true feeling, which might be turned by her to good account, provided she could be induced to regard it in a proper and natural light, and to direct it to its natural objects.

There is also some taste displayed in the arrangement of her *pretty*

trifles, which, if employed for the embellishment of higher objects, might add not a little to their elegance and grace, without impairing their truthfulness and dignity.

Thus respectably, though not highly endowed, were she assiduously to cultivate, instead of merely indulging and gratifying her poetical taste, we repeat our conception, that she may present us, on some future occasion, with a single ode, that will do more credit to herself, as well as to the literature of her country, than all the past productions of her pen.

A solitary production—"The burial of Sir John Moore"—stamped its author *poet* to all posterity. And who would not rather be the author of Mrs. Heman's "England's Dead," or her "Pilgrim Fathers," than of every honey-smeared page, with which even *she* has so often cloyed her greatest admirers. ?

All these things being considered, then, we earnestly hope to be privileged, at no very distant day, to hail some such distinguished effusion of genius, from the pen of our fair countrywoman. And when she shall feel, as feel she then must, the transcendent superiority of such a performance, and the honor and gratification derived from it, she will freely forgive us the apparent severity of our present unwilling and well-intended strictures. And, we tender to her an assurance, that we shall be among the first, and most sincere of her readers, in offering to her the tribute of well earned applause. We shall moreover be most proud and happy, both as a woman and an American, to see her crowned with a chaplet of the brightest bays, that grace our native forests.

In conclusion of this paper, we shall briefly remark, that, had the volume of Poems by Amelia been heralded, by certain partial and injudicious critics, or rather eulogists and flatterers, with more discretion and modesty, and less extravagant praise; had not the most elevated and enviable rank among the poetesses of our country been groundlessly claimed for its authoress—had not the productions contained in it been so repeatedly proclaimed so surpassingly "beautiful," "delicious," and "exquisite," as apparently to constitute an attempt to palm them on the judgment and taste of the readers of America, as all that is refined, and delectable in poetry—had not such boundless commendation been thus wantonly bestowed on it, we should not have dreamed of noticing it with either praise or censure.

So far indeed beyond all reason, as well as all correctness of taste, have these school-boy pæans been carried, in many instances, as to compel us to suspect that their enthusiastic chanters have never even *seen*, much less *attentively read* and deliberately examined, the collection of poems, which they have so seriously injured by their measureless encomiums. In truth, such wild and unqualified panegyric bears much stronger resemblance to *ironical mockery* than sound criticism and *honest commendation*.

Be this suspicion, however, right or wrong, we cannot be mistaken in saying, that, by the lofty pretensions put forth in favor of the volume we have been examining, our disappointment, as to the actual merit of its contents, has been commensurate with the high expectations excited in its behalf. No less, therefore, by a sense of truth and justice, than by pride of place and country, we are constrained to enter our earnest protest against what we regard as a libel on the judgment and taste of the readers and patrons of polite literature, more especially in the *west*—but virtually also throughout the country in general, by the crude and ill-bestowed eulogies, to which we have alluded.

Before taking leave of our subject, we deem it appropriate to our purpose to observe, that, since the foregoing notice of the "Poems by Amelia" was written, we have seen, for the first time, a volume of poetry—"*By two sisters of the West.*" Of these poems we unhesitatingly say, that, though much less pretending, and somewhat less smooth and sweet in versification, than the productions of the Louisville poetess, yet are they, in most of the more vital and important characteristics of poetry, of a far higher order. Most of the latter poems have, in their kind, more or less of merit; and some of them possess, in no ordinary degree, strength, and consistency of thought—force, clearness, and propriety of expression, natural and beautiful imagery, strong and correct feeling, deep moral sentiment, and some obvious purpose held constantly in view. Of these poems the subjects generally are characterized by much more of interest, than those of most of the Poems by Amelia, in almost all of which she is herself, in some way, brought out in highest relief, and therefore made the principal object of attention. And not only are the subjects written on by the "Sisters" more judiciously selectcd; they are treated with far more vigor and skill.

Had we not already very deeply trespassed on the usual limits of an article like the present, and likewise, we fear, on the patience of

our readers, we should be tempted to invite their attention to a parallel between some of the poems, selected from the two volumes, of which we have spoken. But this, at present, cannot be done; and whether the task may be attempted on any future occasion, is an event dependent on circumstances and time.

Without pledging ourselves, however, either that we will or will not resume the subject hereafter, we bid adieu to it, for the present, by expressing our conviction, that, as regards the fame of the poetess, the publication of her poems, *in a volume*, is an ill-advised and unfortunate act. Had she continued, as she began, to make *occasional* contributions to the "poet's corner" of newspapers, or common periodicals, her reputation, as a mere writer of *pretty verses*, might have passed unscathed through the faint ordeal of the undisciplined "million" to which it would have been subjected. The reason of this is plain. Her *seemingly* unpretending productions would have appeared at disconnected periods of time, so remote from each other, that a reciprocal comparison of them could not have been made, without more system and painstaking, than most newspaper readers are prepared to encounter. Hence the striking sameness of the elements composing the poems would have been detected by comparatively few persons. And they would hardly have felt, in the detection, a degree of interest, sufficient to induce them to take the trouble of making it publicly known.

But this could be no longer the case, when those poems were collected into a gaudy, but attractive volume, and placed in such proximity to each other, that one of them could be remembered, while the next one was immediately before the reader's eye, and, under these circumstances, the entire collection perused and compared. In this new and ostentatious condition, which emphatically bespoke, in our authoress, a disposition to assert, whether rightfully or not, her claim to a high rank in poesy, the productions, ardently panegyrized as they were, by certain indiscreet editors, more liberal in their praise, than critical and sound in their judgment, were consequently read with more attention and scrutiny, than they had previously undergone.

While this arrangement set forth, in a manner abundantly confident, the ambitious pretensions of the poems, it also enabled even the careless reader to form a correct judgment of their merits; and, for obvious reasons, that judgment has been generally unfavorable to them.

From the examination thus bestowed on them, it could not fail to

appear, as heretofore stated, that they consist chiefly, of a tiresome reiteration of a few glittering objects, and jingling words, scraps of affected and sickly sentimentalism, extravagant pretensions to super-excellence and refinement, grotesquely unnatural descriptions and creations of fancy, excessive exaggerations of feeling and affection, and an all-pervading spirit of self-exaltation.

Faults so numerous and glaring as these, which are more or less interwoven with every poem in the book, must have soon convinced all readers of discernment and taste, of the important fact, that the poetic powers of our authoress, in whatever degree she may be endowed with them by nature, have not been trained and strengthened by that thorough cultivation, which alone can render their exercise, either in any degree useful to others, or eminently and lastingly creditable to herself. A thought or two more, and we are done.

Censure and condemnation, in criticism, as in every thing else, should be awarded only for beneficent purposes—to be useful alike to writers and readers—to encourage and promote what is right, no less than to discountenance, correct, and extinguish what is wrong. And to these purposes exclusively have we adhered in this article. In no instance has our object been to wound, but to heal—to injure feeling, but to inform the judgment and improve the taste. We have exercised severity with no wantoness, but with deliberation and all the discretion we could command. Should our authoress, therefore, deem us, notwithstanding these truths, unnecessarily harsh in any of our strictures, we most sincerely assure her, in the words of Prince Hamlet, in relation to his "aunt-mother," that, *toward her*, we have been "*cruel only* to be *kind*."

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